

The Right Stuff

Re-Integration and Adaptation Families of Vietnam Era Prisoners of War

LTC Mark Chapin, Ph.D., LISW
Dept of Family Medicine
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Medical Care and Study of POW's and their Families

- 1972-1978: Center for Prisoner of War Studies at Naval Health Research Center, San Diego
- 1978-1997: Data Collection and Medical Follow-Up at Naval Operational Medicine Institute (NOMI), Pensacola
- 1998: Establishment of The Robert E. Mitchell Center for Prisoner of War Studies, NOMI

Dynamics of Captivity and Waiting

- Captive POW's and waiting families experienced parallel stages of adjustment
- Followed Kubler-Ross's Stages of Grief
- Both grieving loss of life as they knew it
- Encountered new circumstances with significant hardships.
- Paradox of grief resolution in context of long term re-adjustment

Reunion of the POW and Family

- Operation Homecoming--567 POW's repatriated in 1973
- Planned for years, but had short notice on execution
- Update POW's on family changes during years of captivity
- Not all news was good

The Longitudinal POW Study and Comparison Group

- 102 of 138 RPOW's participated in the longitudinal family study
- NOMI developed a comparison group comprised of 138 matched aviators and 102 families
- RPOW Study is now in 26th year
- Family data collected 1975-1978

POW's and Families After First Year of Reunion

- Nearly 30% of married families were divorced by end of first year
- Major adjustment to wife's increased independence and new roles
- Husband trying to find place in re-united family
- Re-adjustment occurred in context of great social changes in family roles

Long Term Reintegration of the Repatriated POW and Family

- 50% still married at 5th year post
- Few differences between POW families and comparison group in family functioning measures by 3rd year
- Bi-modal families (children pre and post captivity)
- Many POW wives occupationally delayed by single parenting

Long Term Marital Stability of the Repatriated POW and Family

- Higher rate in first year after return--delay effect
- Lower rate over next 14 years (1974-1987)
- Trend Lines merged in 1987
- Slightly higher rate 1988-1993
- 1998 data collection will allow 25 year rate comparison

Effects of Captivity on RPOW Family Adaptation

- Comparison of Naval Aviator POW's with Control Group showed no significant differences on family measures
- However, comparison with families of Army POW's showed larger variability among Army POW's and higher levels of stress in response to life changes.
- Explanation?

“The Right Stuff”

- Demographics
 - Older at time of captivity
 - Higher rank/career orientation
 - Married longer
- Selection
 - Naval OCS
 - Flight training
 - Successful carrier landings
 - Combat and Survivors
- Training
 - SERE School

Selection and Training Factors

- Role of anxiety and dissociation in survival of POW's—Dr. Jeff Moore
- Role of cortisol in predicting dissociation and failure in SERE School —Dr. Andy Morgan
- Navy POW's and controls experienced rigorous selection process to be those least traumatized by long term captivity
- Army POW's younger, enlisted, drafted

Structural Modeling of Family Adaptation

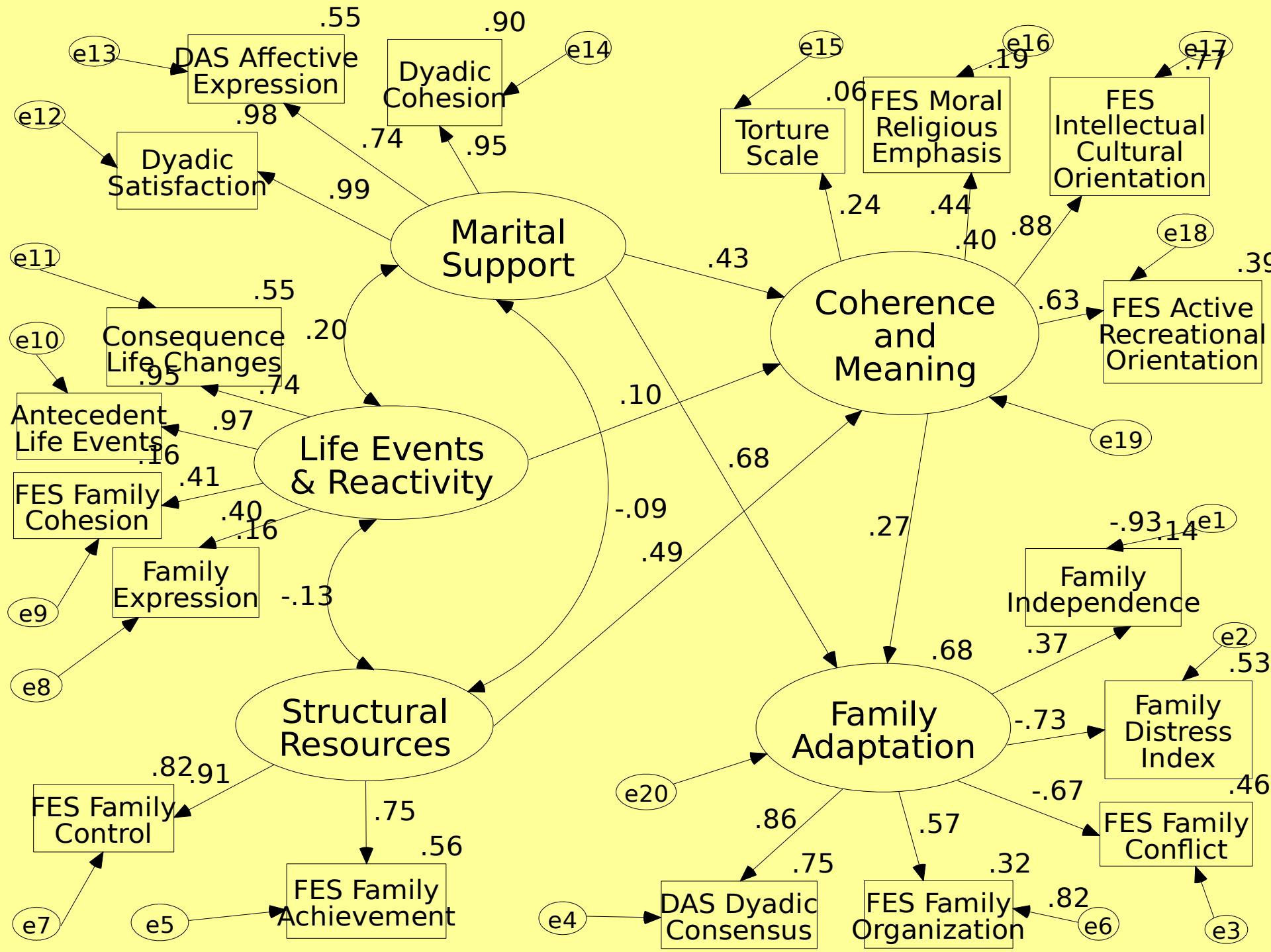
- Observed variables consolidated into latent variables by factor analysis
- Five factors emerged from analysis:
 - Marital Support
 - Family Events and Reactivity
 - Structural Supports
 - Coherence and Meaning
 - Family Adaptation
- This model explains 72.45% of the variance in the model (Error variance = 27.55%)

Structural Modeling of Family Adaptation

- AMOS 4.0 used to develop Structural Equation Model using factors as latent variables
- McCubbin and Patterson's Double ABCX Theory of family resilience and adaptation used to develop path models
- Eight different models tested
- Single identified model emerged which merged theoretical and statistical clarity

Structural Model of RPOW Family Adaptation

- Covariance arrows similar to correlation among predictor variables
- Product Moments describe relationship strength and influence among latent variables—similar to “Beta” in Multiple Regression Equations
- Next slide is busy.....



Lessons Learned about Families of Prisoners of War

- Preparation of family for all possibilities
- Couples who prepare better fare better
- Family sponsor or POC is critical
- First few weeks after capture are critical
- Families in similar situation are helpful
- Grieving process must be facilitated
- Family Assistance Hotline

Lessons Learned about Families of Prisoners of War

- Provide maximum information to family
- Brief family prior to reunion
- Prepare family for media attention
- Repatriation plans need to be flexible
- Resolve MIA status promptly
- Families must be part of homecoming
- Brief RPOW's accurately and soon

Lessons Learned about Families of Prisoners of War

- Caution families that re-integration takes time: un-grieving process
- Families will need continuing support
- Multi-finality of outcomes: some families were strengthened by captivity

Further Research with Families of Prisoners of War

- Dissociation Effects on Torture Recall
- Resilience factors 25 years later
- Adult Children of RPOW's

Questions?
